

Week 7 Guide – Pentecost

- Read each daily Devotional Reading using the SOAP method and Daily Devotional to help you reflect.
- Read the article below prior to group
- Think through the small group and accountability questions after the article

Devotional Readings

Sunday	Ezekiel 11:17-20
Monday	Acts 2:1-11
Tuesday	Psalm 104:25-37
Wednesday	John 14:8-17
Thursday	1 Corinthians 12:4-13
Friday	John 20:19-23
Saturday	Psalm 33

Spirit At Work

Here's the power you need to live the abundant life.

by Craig Keener Issue #91 January/February 1996

Imagine visiting a town at night that appears to have no lights, no televisions —not even alarm clocks. And then imagine learning that the town's power supply is virtually infinite, but that no one in the town had thought to turn any of their electrical appliances on. Wouldn't that town seem like a silly place to you? Yet the Church is all too often like that town. God has given us the power of His Spirit to fulfill His mission in the world, yet few Christians have even begun to depend on His power.

If you're a believer, you already have power within you that can transform your life (Ro. 8:9, 1 Cor. 12:13). The source of this power is the third Person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit. He can help you pray, give you the right words as you witness or counsel, help you recognize God's voice, and make you more like Jesus.

The very moment you began to follow Christ, you became His temple. This means that the God who created the universe, who led the prophets of old, who performed miracles 2,000 years ago, is with you this very moment and every moment. This also means that God can, if He chooses and you obey, do the same kinds of works through you that He did long ago (Jas. 5:14-18).

Tragically, many believers miss out on much of what the Spirit offers because they do not understand how much He can really do in them if they will let Him. Here are some of the ways the Holy Spirit works in and through us.

Power to Witness

The Holy Spirit helps us witness. When I am talking to someone about Christ, I sense the Spirit directing our conversation. Sometimes the Spirit ministers in dramatic ways. On one occasion, I felt impressed to emphasize God's love to a woman I was witnessing to. I stressed that He had been with her through all the pain she had suffered in the past. I knew nothing about her past, but the Spirit did, and she readily embraced the gospel. On another occasion I simply offered prayer for a person who complained that doctors could do nothing for her. When God graciously chose to heal her in answer to prayer, she quickly accepted Christ. Often the Spirit's prompting is less dramatic, but always He proves wiser than we are.

According to Scripture, empowerment for witness is one of the main purposes for which Jesus sent the Spirit and why He insisted that we depend on the Spirit's power (Lk. 24:49, Acts 1:4-5). Indeed, given Paul's usual way of putting things, the "sword of the Spirit" is probably the gospel message, the one offensive weapon for advancing into enemy territory (Eph. 6:17).

Jesus promised that when the Spirit came on them, His disciples would be witnesses for Him (Acts 1:8). The Old Testament often associated the Spirit with the prophets, and in Jesus' day, Jewish people especially thought of the prophets when they thought of the Spirit. Thus Jesus was promising His followers the same power the prophets had! Whatever else we may think about the Spirit's coming on Pentecost, the Spirit surely inspired people to speak as He gave them utterance (Acts 2:4, Acts 2:17-18), proving that God was equipping His people to speak for Him (see Acts 4:8, Acts 4:31; Acts 13:9).

Jesus promised that the Spirit would empower them to be witnesses far beyond Jerusalem (Acts 1:8). In other words, the Spirit would enable the disciples to cross cultural and geographical boundaries, to be missionaries. The disciples experienced a foretaste of this multicultural witness with Jewish pilgrims from many nations on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:5-11). But the Spirit especially began to expand the Church through the ministry of the bicultural ministers who were full of the Spirit (Acts 6:3-5). Stephen laid the theological groundwork for missions by recognizing that God was not localized in Jerusalem (Acts 7), and God led Philip to the Samaritans (Acts 8:5-13) and to an African court official (Acts 8:26-40). The Spirit eventually surmounted the rest of the Jerusalem church's prejudice against Gentiles and missions (Acts 10:19-20, Acts 10:44-48; Acts 11:12-18), and later called for active missionaries to go to unreached parts of the

Gentile world (Acts 13:1–3). Acts is the record of how God empowered His young Church to cross cultural barriers, also confirming His gospel with various signs on the cutting edge of evangelism (Acts 4:15–16, Acts 6:8, Acts 8:6–7, Acts 9:32–42, Acts 14:3, Acts 28:8–9).

Power to Hear God's Voice

The Holy Spirit helps us hear God's voice. In a world where love is often hard to find, the Spirit keeps us in touch with the One who loved us and gave Himself for us. The Spirit ushers Jesus' intimate, personal presence into our lives (Jn. 14:16–23). He also teaches us about some issues Jesus did not cover directly while He was on earth (Jn. 16:12–13). At the same time, the Spirit comes to remind us of what the Lord already taught (Jn. 14:26). He gives us deeper understanding of what God has already shown us in the Bible. No matter how sensitive we may become to the Spirit's voice in our own lives, the Bible remains the ultimate voice of the Spirit (cf. Mk. 12:36, 2 Tim. 3:16–17, Heb. 9:8, 1 Pet. 1:11, 2 Pet. 1:21). It includes an abundance of messages that God spoke to apostles and prophets through history.

The Spirit can guide us in specific situations, especially regarding witnessing (Acts 8:29, Acts 10:19, Acts 16:6). But do you know what the Spirit likes to talk about most of all? He especially likes to show us Jesus (Jn. 16:13–15). Just as Jesus took the things of the Father and revealed them to the disciples as His "friends" (Jn. 15:15), the Spirit now takes the things of Jesus and reveals them to us. This means that we should hear God as clearly as the disciples did 2,000 years ago. Indeed, in light of the resurrection, we should understand Him even better. It also means that the deepest revelation the Spirit has come to give us is to show us God's heart, so we can be more and more like Him. It is no coincidence that when Jesus was revealing God's heart (Jn. 15:15), He talked especially about love (Jn. 15:9–17). Thus the Spirit comes into our hearts, pointing to the Cross and reminding us continually: "See! I love you! I love you! I love you!" (Ro. 5:5–8).

A Heart Like God's Heart

The Holy Spirit helps us to have hearts like God's heart. Nearly 10 years ago a man led my closest friend away from the faith. The Bible says to pray for one's enemies, and I was praying for him all right—I was praying that God would kill him! But the Spirit reprimanded me. And as I grudgingly obeyed the Spirit's guidance, I learned to forgive as God had forgiven me. In time I found that I could love that man enough to lay down my life for him—which to me was as great a miracle as any physical miracle I had ever seen.

In Paul's day, false teachers were trying to get the Galatian Christians to do religion "in the flesh," by their own ability rather than by God's grace. Paul warned that new life in Christ comes only by God's transforming Spirit, whom we receive only by faith (Gal. 3:2–5). So Paul lists the best works that "flesh," humanity in our self-centeredness, can produce: works like sexual immorality, idolatry, witchcraft, jealousy, and drunkenness (Gal. 5:19–21). But Jesus offers us something better than religion by merely human ability; He sends His Spirit into our hearts to make us like Himself (Gal. 4:6). The "fruit" of the Spirit contrasts starkly with the "works" of the flesh (Gal. 5:16–23). Fruit is not something we work up, but something we produce simply because it is our nature to produce it. The fruit of the Spirit means that because God's Spirit lives inside us, He produces in us character that is like His character. God's character includes love, joy, peace, enduring patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control. The more we depend on His grace at work in our lives, the more these aspects of His character will become our own character in Him.

Power to Be Holy

The Holy Spirit helps us to be holy. The Christians in Galatia were not the only people who struggled with how to fulfill God's righteousness. Paul tells the believers in Rome that God provides righteousness as a free gift in Christ (Ro. 4:23–25), which a person lives out by faith (Ro. 6:11). The law tells us about God's righteousness, but by itself it cannot change our hearts (Ro. 7:6, Ro. 7:12–14); but the Spirit comes and writes God's law in our hearts (Ro. 8:2, cf. Ezk. 36:26–27). This means that when the Spirit comes into our lives He gives us an entirely new way of thinking (Ro. 8:5–6). Now we do God's will not just because we are "supposed" to, but because we love to please our heavenly Father.

Power to Anticipate the Future

The Holy Spirit helps us anticipate what the world to come will be like. Because the Spirit lives in us, we are people of the future, and by looking at our lives, the world around should know what the Kingdom will be like. The Old Testament prophets had announced that the Spirit would be available in the end-time (Joel 2:28–29), so when the disciples heard about the coming of the Spirit, they assumed that the end of the age was just around the corner (Acts 1:6). In one sense, they were right: The Spirit gives us a foretaste of the glories of God's coming Kingdom (Ro. 14:17, 1 Cor. 2:9–10, cf. Heb. 6:5) and power to endure until Jesus returns ("hope" in Ro. 15:13, Gal. 5:5).

That is why Paul speaks of the "guarantee," or literally, the "down payment" of the Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22, 2 Cor. 5:5; Eph. 1:13–14). In the Bible the "firstfruits" was the actual beginning of a harvest, so having the firstfruits of the Spirit gives us a foretaste of that future hope that makes us long for it all the more intensely (Ro. 8:23). In the Spirit we have begun to experience eternal life, the life we will be living with God through all the ages of eternity (Jn. 3:5–6, Jn. 3:16). Sometimes experiencing the Spirit in worship makes us yearn all the more passionately for the day when we will worship God undistracted; but we yearn for that day precisely because we have already begun to experience a foretaste of that future glory. Someday, when Jesus returns, the Spirit will finish what He has begun and usher us into the full life of the age to come (Ro. 8:11, 1 Cor. 15:44, Gal. 6:8).

Help to Pray

The Holy Spirit helps us to pray. Often when I pray for a person or a nation, I sense the Spirit's direction to pray for specific areas that I might not have recognized otherwise. Paul (Eph. 6:18) and Jude (20) both speak of prayer "in" or "by" the Holy Spirit. Because the Old Testament and first-century Jewish tradition associated the Spirit especially with prophetic inspiration, these passages may mean that the Spirit helps us to pray by supplying us with the right matters to pray. Sometimes when we do not know what to pray, the Spirit also intercedes for us with unutterable groanings (Ro. 8:26–27). Similarly, the Spirit can guide and empower our worship (Jn. 4:23–24, Eph. 5:18–20, Phil. 3:3). We may not always feel His power, but we can depend on Him to direct our attention to the One who hears our prayers and deserves our sincerest worship.

Reminders of Our Inheritance

The Spirit reminds us whose we really are. Sometimes I get so wrapped up in what God has called me to do that I forget the most important part of my identity. Then the Spirit softly whispers the Father's word to my heart afresh, "My child." Whatever else God may have called me to do, no calling is greater than the calling to be His child. When we are knocking our heads against a world often hostile to our message, the Spirit often speaks a word of encouragement to our hearts, simply reminding us that we are God's children (Ro. 8:15–17; 1 Jn. 3:24, 1 Jn. 5:6–7). Paul elsewhere speaks of that assurance as a "seal" (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13, Eph. 4:30). A "seal" was often a stamp of ownership or of an inspector's approval. Paul reminds us that the presence and work of God's Spirit in our lives proves that we really belong to God.

Other Roles

The Spirit performs many other roles in our lives. The Spirit carries on Jesus' mission of convicting the world (Jn. 16:8–11) through our witness (Jn. 15:26–27, Jn. 16:7). Those who respond He births anew (Jn. 3:5–6, Gal. 4:29), setting them apart for Christ (2 Thess. 2:13, 1 Pet. 1:2). The Spirit gifts us so we can serve other Christians (1 Cor. 12:1–14:40, Lk. 2:25–27, Acts 11:28). The Spirit is the mark of our new freedom in Christ (Ro. 7:6, 2 Cor. 3:17). The Spirit gives us fellowship (2 Cor. 13:14) and unity (Eph. 4:3–4), and enables us to submit to one another (Eph. 5:18, Eph 5:21). He also gives us much joy in knowing that He has brought us to Himself (Acts 13:52; Ro. 14:17, Ro. 15:13; 1 Thess. 1:6).

While the role that the Holy Spirit desires to have in our lives is enormous, many believers do not begin to allow Him to work. Whether through fear, ignorance, or sin, they have effectively hindered Him. Most of us have only begun to explore the works God yearns to do in our lives by His Holy Spirit! Don't be afraid to give Him freedom to work. Your life will never be the same!

On Your Own:

He Comes With Power

1. For each of the following passages, describe the results of the Spirit's powerful presence.

Num. 24:1–14

Jdg. 3:7–11

Ezk. 36:26–27

Lk. 2:25–35

Acts 4:31

Acts 8:26–39

Acts 9:31

Acts 10:19–20

2. In what areas of life are you longing for spiritual empowerment? How does Lk. 11:11–13 encourage you?

3. What further encouragement do you find in Ro. 8:26–27?

Small Group Questions

Accountability

Divine Living - Are you building an interactive relationship with God? In your private prayer and devotional time, what are you learning or experiencing? How are you Knowing Christ in worship? Are you reaching your group and individual goals in this area?

Open / Scripture

1. Have you ever traveled where you did not speak the language? What happened?

Observation

1. As you read this passage (Acts 2:1-11) what verse, phrase, or picture jumps out at you, causes you to celebrate, raises questions, or clarifies something?

2. Why did God wait until Pentecost, a Jewish harvest festival (Dt 16:9-10) to give the Holy Spirit?

3. How far have these pilgrims come (vv. 9-11)? What attracts them to the disciples? How does being filled with the Spirit relate to bearing witness to Jesus?

Apply

1. Would you respond more like those in verse 12, or those in verse 13? Why?

2. Have you ever seen the gift of tongues used this way? Another way?

3. When have you experienced an empowering from God to witness about Christ?